

Margaret Neill

The Pleasures of Parallax

The organic forms of nature have provided abstract painters with a point of departure since abstraction's invention a century ago, but Margaret Neill does much more, in her work, than reinterpret the appearances of the natural world. She invents analogies for the visceral and optical sensations accompanying its experience. Primary among these is parallax, the apparent change in the relative position of objects as seen by an observer in motion. The artist approximates this perceptual phenomenon through a sophisticated shuffling of the painting's visual hierarchy, by means of which glancingly aligned edges of neighboring shapes suggest (but infrequently allow) a gap through which hurtling space is glimpsed. Such pictorial expansion is tempered by the pressure exerted on these tremulous, forceful configurations by the boundaries of the canvas. These remarkable paintings convey imminence, insist on transience, and are anchored by dynamic equilibrium.

Their imagery is bound up with the artist's idiosyncratic paint handling. She scrapes semiliquid layers of paint one over another, developing complex hues informed by the inner glow of filtered light. The method mediates her touch, and the attendant optical blending of color suggests form rising up out of a depth of pictorial space. Yet there is no missing these paintings' undulating lateral movement. Though their flat areas of color are devoid of illusionistic rendering, they imply volume through contour. Swaying, billowing shapes suggest the motion of wind or water, or the unfurling of botanical forms. Bulbous shapes bump against or glide past each other, eliding space in their indeterminate scale. These pictures might be enlargements of localized conditions, or panoramic views of enveloping circumstances. In many, there is a warm spot—a sumptuous color chord or unexpected, deeply idiosyncratic drawing decision—to which the eye repeatedly returns. They are elegant and graceful, but also full of surprises, like the way the edges of a shape veer apart to become a chromatic environment, or tuck behind each other and vanish. For me, there is a moment after a period of looking at one of Margaret's paintings when awareness of the process by which it was formed falls away and the painting seems, simply, inevitable.

—*Stephen Maine*

Stephen Maine is an artist and critic based in Brooklyn.